

The Ripple Effect of Collective IMPACT

Mayor Michael B. Coleman has built the City of Columbus' reputation as one of the best cities in the nation by building stronger, safer neighborhoods and by creating jobs that help maintain a high quality of life. Columbus has attracted thousands of families hoping to gain a fresh start or a new opportunity to improve their lives and fulfill their dreams; but what happens when the dream is threatened by crisis or financial misfortune? What happens when the fragile state of self-sufficiency meets the weight of adversity and persons feel incapable of navigating their crisis? This is the story of Ms. Chanel F. and Mr. Terrence P., a young couple with two small children and another child on the way. Together they are facing their new frontier and encountering many obstacles. The City of Columbus has been called "the best place to live, work and to raise a family," but it is also considered the best place to gain support for self-sufficiency from a network of professionals who care. No single agency can do it alone; but through collective IMPACT, this agency and others work together to keep families united.

Q. Tell us how your life changed?

A. Chanel: One minute I was at the Mayor's conference on education. We just enrolled our three-year-old son in the Hilltop Pre-School. I had been selected to introduce the Mayor and to speak on behalf of the parents. I shared our concerns with the struggles of balancing parenting, education, family life and how we supported the early education of our children. This was a highlight of our being accepted into this community and a part of its citizenship on the West Side. I felt really great about it. However, in the next minute, when we returned home from the conference, we found an eviction sticker on our door that demanded that we vacate the premises by midnight. Our house had been foreclosed and we were told to leave.



Q. What happened to cause this situation?

A. Terrence: The economy went south in Canton, Michigan (where the couple lived for many years) and became unemployed. I had never been without a job. I was applying everywhere and was being rejected. I am from Alabama and was taught that a man is supposed to be able to take care of his family. I felt the pressure of not being able to provide for my children and my fiancée. I was watching our dreams slip away and I became frustrated. Family members encouraged me to move to Columbus where there were more job opportunities. It was a hard decision to make. But I made it.

Q. What happened next?

A. Terrence: I moved to Columbus in 2012 and within 30 days, I had fulltime employment. I was over whelmed! Within 90 days, I sent for my fiancée and our kids. She is from Michigan. A month later, Chanel was employed as well. We found a home on Craigslist and moved to the west side in a growing community. We have maintained ourselves without assistance. We both worked and were raising our family. My fiancée' is expecting another baby. You can't imagine how we felt finding out that we had to move. It was a nightmare. The people here didn't show the southern hospitality that we were used to so we felt offset by the lack of friendliness and compassion. We didn't know what to do, so we gathered our important documents and looked for storage because at this point we were homeless.

Q. Who did you call for help?

A. Literally, we had no place to go. We had all but given up and considered relocating to Texas to stay with Terrence's father; but then we followed up with (Mr. Matthew S.,) a representative from the City of Columbus who we met at the Mayor's press conference on education. This started a chain of events. He (Mr. Matthew S.) contacted Mrs. Latisha Chastang at IMPACT Community Action, who contacted IMPACT's CEO, Mr. Robert "Bo" Chilton, who contacted two of his employees, Ms. Marcia White in the Empowerment Services Department and Ms. Regina Clemons in the Emergency Assistance Department to see how they could help us keep our family together and help us get through this crisis. In addition to the representative from the City and the team from IMPACT, we also received assistance from another wonderful person (Ms. Terry R.,) who helped place us in a hotel through the resources of a generous anonymous donor. We didn't have to sleep in our car!

Q. Was it difficult to request help?

A. Chanel: Yes. Our pride was damaged. We had been fighting for a good life for so long. In the midst of this I lost my job and the stress was beginning to take a toll on us. Terrence said that it was important to him to be his own man and work and earn a living. He held us down (provided for the family) but I could see the stress in his eyes. He sacrificed a lot to come to Columbus. We did not want a hand out but we felt helpless.

Q. What happened next?

A. The Friday evening that this (the foreclosure) occurred, the shelter was full and could not accommodate us. Ms. Terry R. assisted our family with securing a hotel room. We were so relieved, even if it was just a temporary place to stay that was safe and clean. We had no money because we had to rent a truck and move our things in to storage. Ms. White from IMPACT became our angel as she assessed our situation and moved quickly on our behalf. I've never seen anyone so passionate and about helping others. She made us feel like everything was going to be all right. Ms. White spoke with HOMEPORT, Gladden House and several other agencies on our behalf. We were given pantry referrals and she even provided meals for our family because we had no money to purchase food.

Q. What problems did you have with housing?

A. Chanel: Ms. White worked with several organizations including Mt. Olivet Baptist Church and a few generous anonymous donors and to keep us in a hotel room while we searched frantically for another house or apartment. We needed safe, affordable housing; but our options were few. Ms. White then introduced us to Mr. Leland Bass, a Self-Sufficiency Coordinator at IMPACT who helped me find an employment opportunity, which I took. With two incomes in the household we increased our chances of being housed.

Q. What happened next?

A. The housing opportunities were looking bleak; and we couldn't stay in the hotel for too much longer. We had to find affordable housing. In addition to the phone calls she made on our behalf already, Ms. White reached out to contacts via social media (Facebook) and made a plea for housing for us. Ms. White's in box was flooded with offerings, including one from a one of her trusted friends. She took us to see the property; and it was exactly what we needed. When Terrence paid the deposit, he felt confident that once again he could take care of his family. He is very proud.

Q. Are you happy about your decision to stay and work things out?

A. Chanel: We are! We didn't know where to turn and we have been overwhelmed by the amount of support that we have received from IMPACT Community Action and the network that they use to help people. I have eight classes left in Ohio Business College for an Associate Degree in Business Management with a concentration in Human Services. Columbus is a city that believes in education and family. I am going to remain employed and get my degree in spite of it all. Ms. White "earned her wings" and we will be forever grateful to her, IMPACT and everyone else who helped us during our time of need. Sometimes you can feel punished when you are trying to do all of the right things and not only everything goes wrong but you have no support. IMPACT Community Action supported our family and we kept our dignity and self respect. We felt empowered through this process and still find it hard to believe that people really help people like this. We now have an answer for other families like ours. Go to IMPACT Community Action. If they can help you to help yourself, they will.

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